



EMPLOYEE TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT

Lessons From Mickey Mouse

Employers can learn key lessons from the “Happiest Place on Earth.”

Recruiting and retaining talent can be tough. Top-notch employees not only expect competitive pay, but also an engaged culture and a job they find fulfilling on both personal and professional levels. It can be challenging for companies, particularly small businesses, to meet the demands of the modern worker.

Organizational leaders often strive to create a positive workplace environment, but how would you feel if your company had to fulfill the claim of being the “Happiest Place on Earth?” It’s certainly a tall task—creating that level of satisfaction not only among your customers, but among your employees.

Early in my career, I was recruited by The Walt Disney Company to represent my home country of France at the French Pavilion at Walt Disney World near Orlando, Florida. I ended up spending several years with the organization and went on to become a VIP tour guide, as well as a trainer for Disney employees.

Working for one of the most famous brands in the world taught me the secret to attracting and holding on to an all-star staff: Investing in learning and development. The best way to inspire your existing team and position your company for new talent is to provide opportunities for self-growth that go beyond regular day-to-day responsibilities.

Train everyone

A golden rule of learning and development is the importance of training everyone in your organization, not only those with client-facing roles. Custodians at Disney receive intensive customer service training because they are some of the most recognizable employees on the theme park grounds. Though customer service might initially seem outside of a custodian’s job description, Disney recognizes that every employee has a part to play in providing excellent service.

Disney and your dealership

The foundations of customer service are the same no matter where you work. Whether you’re an employee at a multi-billion dollar brand like Disney or at a dealership, your number one focus is the customer, and the approach is surprisingly similar.

The front desk receptionist or the sales person are obvious candidates for training programs because of the amount they interact with buyers. But what about administration office employees or the bookkeeper? If they too receive training, you’ll ensure a consistent customer experience and your staff will share a deeper bond.

People vs. technical skills

Learning and development go beyond the basics of customer service, and investing in your employees’ training can come in many forms. Typically, training is divided into two categories based on the nature



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of the content: People or “soft skills” vs. technical or “hard skills.”

People skills courses focus on areas such as communication, team effectiveness, dealing with conflict, leadership, and coaching or stress management. These courses can be enormously valuable in a dealership, especially if you’ve got a team that feels pressure to meet certain performance standards or sales quotas.

Technical skills training is equally important and often focuses on areas like F&I product knowledge, software system training, or selling techniques. These courses aim to increase your team’s


If you invest in your employees’ future, they’ll often reward that generosity with an investment in return. If you provide your staff with training opportunities, they will feel more intellectually stimulated, connected to their colleagues, and more dedicated to the success of their employer.

In reality, there’s more inherent risk in not training your employees. A storied exchange between two executives sums it up best, with the CFO asking, “What happens if we train them and they leave?” and the CEO responding, “What happens if we don’t and they stay?”

Resources for small business

You don’t need a large budget to provide your staff with learning opportunities. For example, professional networking site LinkedIn allows you to seek out consultants who specialize in small business programming. These consultants can create customized solutions that address the unique circumstances of your business for an affordable price. If you aren’t quite at that stage, community colleges across the country offer public workshops on skills development for a small fee.

There’s also government support available in many provinces. In British Columbia, for instance, the Canada-B.C. Job Grant (CJG) is an employer-driven, cost-sharing program that helps employers invest in training for their current or future employees. Conducting some simple research online should uncover local options that work for you.

Though you may be far from setting up a global training program for employees like Disney University, providing even a handful of learning and development opportunities can reinvigorate your employees and attract highly qualified newcomers. Instead of your team outgrowing their jobs, they may just grow your brand. 

“Train people well enough so they can leave, treat them well enough so they don’t want to.”

Richard Branson,
Billionaire

productivity and enable them to execute on their daily tasks more efficiently.

What if they leave?

Many leaders think they’ll lose their best and brightest employees if they equip individuals with skills that make them more competitive in the job market. Billionaire businessman Richard Branson doesn’t agree, and famously revealed his approach to employee development as, “Train people well enough so they can leave, treat them well enough so they don’t want to.”